This is a summary of an actual conversation I had with one of my instructors in mid-August.

Sarah: Morning Randy, getting ready for the start of another semester?

Randy: Yes, boy did it sneak up fast. Have you taken care of your textbook adoption with the new supplier at the campus bookstore?

Sarah: Yes, I took care of it last week. The system was very easy to use.

Randy: Good I’m glad to hear that. I’ve been debating about adding at least a recommended text for my course. Since it’s typically the first food science course those enrolled have taken, I try to provide all the information they need. However, I’ve had more and more students ask if there is a supplemental or recommended text they could refer to. I started looking online and called the new supplier at the campus bookstore to get an idea for price on a couple textbooks I’d found that would supplement the topics covered in my course. I was completely flabbergasted that the average cost was $110!

Sarah: I know, it is crazy how the cost of textbooks has increased since my time as an undergraduate 10 years ago.

Randy: I was really disappointed that not a single book covered all that I’d need it to and I can’t see listing two 100 plus dollar books even as recommended texts. My kids are a senior and freshman this year at K-State and I can’t believe the cost of just their books.

Sarah: By the time my two are in college, I’m not sure we could even afford the books let alone help with tuition.

Randy: There is one class my daughter is enrolled in; I think it’s an introduction to sociology course, that utilizes an eBook for the course. She says her instructor as well as his colleagues both here at K-State and other institutions collaborated to create this eBook. She was able to download it from some online site and it only cost $30. She showed me a chapter in it last night and it was amazing. There were interactive images and quizzes built in throughout the chapter and not just questions at the end of the chapter. Have you heard or worked on anything like this?

Sarah: Actually, I attended a half-day workshop at a conference this summer that was all about eBooks. It covered several different formats where/how to start, legal/copyright issues that may be or become involved and how to distribute a completed eBook.

Randy: Very good! Do you have a few minutes to give me a quick overview? This may be a better avenue to explore versus a print textbook. I just have an incredibly hard time asking students to pay a pile of money for a textbook that they may get pennies on the dollar when they re-sell it at the bookstore.

Sarah: Sure, no problem. First, you’ll have to look at the format. The three formats that I learned about were Adobe DPS (Digital Publishing Suite), Inkling+Habitat and iBooks.

Randy: Hmmm, Adobe. In my experience if it has the word Adobe attached to it, that equals expensive dollar signs…

Sarah: You are correct, of the three options it’s the most expensive and probably not as user friendly as I would need significant training to get up to speed on how to use it.

Randy: Ok, so Adobe probably isn’t the best option. What about iBooks? That should be an easy no-brainer since we both use Macs.

Sarah: Well, there’s a yes and no to that question. Yes, it would be easy for us to collaborate on since iBooks is free software and we are both already Mac users. However, content produced using iBooks is only available on iPads…at least for now. I’ve heard a rumor that possibly the Mac OS X this fall and maybe the iOS 7 phone MAY be compatible.

Randy: Ugh, that stinks! So do you have any other suggestions?

Sarah: Yes, Inkling+Habitat. Inkling is the app that can be downloaded to aid in content creation and Habitat is the online website where professionals can collaborate on the same project.

Randy: Interesting. Is there cost involved and what devices can access an Inkling book?

Sarah: There is no software to purchase; an Inkling book is authored online. Currently, an Inkling book can be viewed using iOS, or any internet browser (Mac or PC) and the company has promised to make viewing available on the Android network soon.

Randy: Well, that sounds intriguing. Is an Inkling book easy to create?

Sarah: Fairly. The authoring learning curve is a little steep. Inkling has it’s own terminology but I was told that once you get used to that, it is simple and easy to work with. I was able to pick it up fairly easily at the seminar.

Randy: Are there any real negative issues?

Sarah: A few but I don’t think they are deal breakers. All Inkling books are distributed via the Inkling website (<https://www.inkling.com/>). One chapter of any Inkling book has to be available for free via their website. The workshop was too short to delve into how an eBook price is set, but if we decided to pursue this avenue; I’d certainly look into it. The other potential negative is that unless you are using the Inking iPhone or iPad app to access Inkling content, an Internet connection is required to access Inkling eBooks. Did either of those scare you away from an eBook?

Randy: No, not entirely. I would like to pursue this as an option for a textbook for my introduction to food science course. I don’t think I would be able to start working on another large project such as this until 2014. Would you be willing to research the logistics of Inkling and we’ll meet again around Thanksgiving and hopefully go full steam ahead.

Sarah: I’d be glad to.